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**HB 7027 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June thirtieth 209 and Making Appropriations Therefor**

**February 16, 2017**

**Kati Mapa, Interim Executive Director, ERMHB**

Good evening Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, and members of the committee.

My name is Kati Mapa, I am the Interim Executive Director of the Eastern Regional Mental Health Board, and I'm a registered voter in the city of Norwich. I am writing to you today to testify on behalf of the Department of Social Services; the cuts made by the Governor and OPM to the DSS budget as they currently stand will be detrimental to many members of our community and should not be passed by the Legislature.

The Regional Mental Health Boards have a statutory mandate to evaluate DMHAS-funded mental health programs. In my role with the Eastern Regional Mental Health Board, I regularly listen to the fears, concerns, and struggles of members of our community. Every month at our Catchment Area Council meetings, community members are given the opportunity to bring their concerns and experiences to the group discussion to share with one another and to pool knowledge and resources to solve problems. In our service evaluation process, staff and clients of the DMHAS-funded mental health system are invited to share their thoughts and opinions about the services they receive. During our biennial planning process, participants in focus groups are asked to share their views on the system as a whole, both the parts that work well and the parts that need help.

Although our mandate only covers DMHAS services, I regularly hear community members voice concerns about other state agencies, because the people that are served by DMHAS often are also served by other agencies at various points in their lives. Many of our members are also impacted by cuts to the Department of Social Services; in fact, when asked about problems with their services, many clients jump straight to issues they encounter with DSS: long wait times, lost paperwork, and reduced benefits – all concerns that are results of chronic underfunding of this agency. Our members and clients already face significant barriers in accessing services at DSS in a timely and efficient manner; further cuts to the DSS budget will result in increased frustration and decreased access.

Today I would like to address one of the proposed cuts in particular: the co-pay increases for dually eligible Medicare and Medicaid recipients. The proposed elimination of the \$17 copay cap for Medicaid and Medicare dually eligible individuals, a cut that amounts to approximately \$80,000, will result in these high-need and low-income individuals having to pay *all* Medicare Part D copays for their

prescriptions. Many of these individuals have multiple prescriptions that would fall under this change, placing a huge burden on people who are already poor and have very limited resources at their disposal.

For you and me, paying one or two additional copays each month would probably not cause significant stress, but for my friend Chris\* (name changed), whose monthly budget is planned out to the very last cent to cover his basic needs and expenses, even a small increase in the cost of his medical care (in this instance, in the form of a copay) would likely result in him forgoing medications to save money, a move that may find him in the hospital (a much more costly scenario) down the road. At the board, I have heard stories from clients about rationing their medicines, taking them every other day instead of every day, in order to make them last longer, sometimes with harmful consequences to their health. Placing the burden of cuts on Medicare and Medicaid dually eligible individuals is unfair, as it hurts low-income individuals who are unable to sustain that sort of burden.

I am opposed to the cuts to the DSS budget that have been proposed, particularly those that so directly affect the clients with whom I work, many of whom are struggling to get by as it is. I urge you to ensure that the welfare of low-income, high-need individuals is protected in any budget that is brought to a vote in the Legislature.

Thank you for your hard work and thank you for your time. If you have any questions for me, I would be happy to answer them. I can be reached at 860-886-0030 or at the following email address:  
[kmapa.ermhb@gmail.com](mailto:kmapa.ermhb@gmail.com).

Best,

Kati Mapa, MSW  
Interim Executive Director